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FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
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SUBJECT: SPECIAL MEDIA REACTION: PRESIDENTIAL
INAUGURATION/NEW ADMINISTRATION'S FOREIGN POLICY

This cable reports on relevant media reaction from
India's English and large non-English press.

¶1. SUMMARY: The Indian media reported and commented widely on the incoming and outgoing Presidents. Reports said President Bush on Monday made a round of farewell phone calls to world leaders, while President-elect Obama and his wife Michelle attended the Lincoln Memorial inaugural concert in Washington Sunday. Over the weekend, leading newspapers devoted special sections to the Presidential inauguration, with photos and trivia and write-ups on former U.S. presidents. Reports said Barack Obama and his family would make history Tuesday as the first black first family to move into the White House, a mansion largely built by slaves. It was reported that hours before his inauguration, Obama appointed Indian-American lawyer Preeta Bansal as the Senior Policy Advisor in the Office of Management and Budget. Editorial commentary reflected displayed cautious optimism on the President-elect's likely foreign policy, particularly vis-`-vis South Asia. While commentary on President Bush was predictably uncharitable, many newspapers conceded that he was good for India. Commentary from India's leading English and language newspapers follows.

PRESIDENTIAL INAUGURATION/NEW ADMINISTRATION'S
FOREIGN POLICY

¶2. "OBAMA'S BIG CHALLENGES," analysis in January 20 THE

TIMES OF INDIA by foreign editor Indrani Bagchi: "In a recession-wracked America, bruised and battered by eight years of Bush, Obama has little option but to find quick deliverables in his first 100 days.... Obama's silence after saying that if rockets were threatening his daughters he would go after them - is seen as support for Israel. Which makes him no different from any other U.S. President. But if the Arab world is hoping he will do their work for them of neutralizing Hamas, that's not going to happen.... Iraq will remain a challenge even after the pullout. But Obama will also have to think about what to do with Iran, which finances Hamas and Hezbollah, and Shia militias in Iraq, and has become a nuclear nuisance.... Obama's challenge will be to bring Pakistan back from the jihadi edge, choke their support to the Taliban, work them out of their "strategic depth" mindset, and persuade them that the same terrorists they train to send to India are the ones that may attack the US. To stabilize Afghanistan, he will go to all those European countries who hated Bush and ask for troops - just like Bush."

¶3. "OUR OBAMA MOMENT," op-ed analysis by consulting editor C. Raja Mohan in January 20 centrist INDIAN EXPRESS English daily: "It is the third element of Obama's argument that is viewed with some apprehension in New Delhi. Obama's assessment is that addressing Pakistan's security concerns on the east with India holds the key to Islamabad's genuine cooperation in the war on terror.... For the US, which now faces a real prospect of

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defeat in Afghanistan, South Asia is at the very top of its foreign policy agenda. Whether India likes it or not, Washington will devote substantive diplomatic energies towards the subcontinent, and New Delhi will be drawn into this dynamic. Instead of opposing something that is about to unfold, New Delhi must offer full cooperation to Obama in South Asia on terms that are mutually acceptable.... It will be a pity if India does not grasp this historic opportunity because its leaders lack either the self-assurance or the strategic imagination to leverage Obama's South Asia initiative."

¶4. "BUSHED WORLD," editorial in January 20 centrist THE TIMES OF INDIA: "Unsurprisingly, in his farewell address, Bush said there are things he'd have done differently if given the chance. Legions of his critics say he had his chance not once, but twice and he blew it.... Despite his frayed image, Bush retains a measure of goodwill in India. He assiduously built on a rapprochement initiated by the Clinton administration. His free trade advocacy and commitment to the path-breaking India-US nuclear deal deepened relations. Should Obama-led America and India continue to strengthen diplomatic and strategic ties between the world's two largest democracies, the gains will be on both sides."

¶5. "FROM INDIA WITH LOVE," analysis in January 18 THE TIMES OF INDIA by foreign editor Indrani Bagchi: "India has a strong interest in shaping Obama's world in the next four years. India has come a long way since the last Democrat administration. Courtesy George Bush, we are accustomed to living in a different style. Will it continue, be enhanced or diminished by Obama will depend upon his plans - does he want to make India a partner or a target?.... Primarily, it will be Obama's approach to Pakistan and Afghanistan that will define the nature of the new relationship with India... India and China will inevitably get in each other's way. The key is to ensure that the US stays out of it, or on India's side.... Global security will be a key component of Obama's foreign policy agenda, and by its very nature, India is on the right side. India has to make sure it is an indispensable voice in shaping the security agenda. Transnational threats such as nuclear non-proliferation, terrorism,

HIV/AIDS will be shared dangers.... India is bound to come under pressure from the US as the fall guy for domestic failures on eco-friendly policy change."

¶6. "THE SECOND NEW DEAL," editorial in January 20 centrist ECONOMIC TIMES English daily: "President-elect Obama's vision of a second New Deal faces some risks the first one did. Roosevelt's New Deal during the Great Depression was a huge political success, but an economic quasi-failure.... Having learned from history, Obama will doubtless avoid some of Roosevelt's errors.... Hopefully, we will not get another Smoot-Hawley Act levying big imports tariffs. However, the Bush-Bernanke stimulus did not cure the recession, so it's not obvious that the Obama stimulus will.... Luckily he has time on his side, and - like Roosevelt before him - can get elected with populist rhetoric even if the economic recovery is weak.

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Meanwhile we must hope he will ditch the protectionist noises of his election campaign."

¶7. "CAN OBAMA CORRECT U.S. WEST ASIA POLICY?" Op-ed analysis by Govind Talwalkar in January 20 centrist ASIAN AGE English daily: "Barack Obama, who takes office today, says that among the problems he would give priority to in international politics would be the ceasefire in Gaza.... It is difficult to imagine Mr. Obama making a complete break with America's West Asia policy.... Olmert cannot be trusted. But even if the messenger is dubious, the message is relevant. Mr. Obama should support the solution suggested by Mr. Olmert as it is the only course open. If Palestinians and Syrians are satisfied, Iran would lose the upper-hand which it enjoys at present. But both the Democrats and the Republicans have so far refused to break with the past and hence it is difficult to expect much from the Obama administration with regard to West Asia."

¶8. "FOR OBAMA, IT'S TIME TO DELIVER," editorial in January 20 centrist THE ASIAN English daily: "Mr. Obama must aim at making the Pakistan military break its nexus with the jihadists on pain of aid reduction and eventual elimination should results not be forthcoming.... The Obama administration would seek to "build on" its "political and economic partnership" with India, to quote the secretary of state-designate. The outgoing administration led by George W. Bush did much to strengthen India and spoke of a "strategic partnership" with this country. The Obama Democrats are apparently pitching a bit lower. But we'll know more as we go along."

¶9. "THE DAY THE WORLD'S WAITED FOR IS HERE," editorial in January 20 centrist MAIL TODAY English daily: "His next four years at the White House are not going to be easy. In fact, he is inheriting one of the most difficult presidential terms in American history.... Obama's foreign policy, especially relating to South Asia and Afghanistan, will need serious consideration from India. Obama has always maintained that the epicenter of the war on terror is the Afghan-Pakistan border, and not Iraq. Therefore, his stance on the Pakistan government will be important and in this context, Kashmir can enter the equation. Obama's trade policies - especially those relating to outsourcing - will also have to be looked at closely.... One important issue, nuclear non-proliferation, has been decided by the Bush administration. This is a plus since it can no longer poison Indo-U.S. relations. Yet, India must push the right buttons to ensure it remains an important friend, if not ally, of the US in the 21st century."

¶10. "PRESIDENT OBAMA: ENORMOUS CHALLENGES TO MEET," editorial in January 20 centrist THE TRIBUNE English daily: "With President Obama, there is some hope for change in the US. As most Americans expect, he is bound

to concentrate on how to turn the US economy around as his first priority. It is indeed a challenging task.... A bit of Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal may become necessary, but he has to be really innovative to pull his

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country out of the crisis. New Delhi will be watching with curiosity not only his moves on job outsourcing, which can adversely affect India's BPO companies, but also how the Obama administration looks at the US relations with India. The Bush administration took the Indo-US ties to a new high with the signing of the nuclear deal. Mr. Obama has indicated that the relations between the two countries will be strengthened further during his tenure in the Oval Office, but how he keeps his word remains to be seen.... If he succumbs to the wishes of the nuclear ayatollahs in the Democratic Party there can be difficulties in relations with India.... The Obama administration will help fight terrorism if it forces Pakistan to change its policy and crack down on terrorist groups."

¶11. "HISTORY'S MAN," editorial in January 20 centrist DAILY NEWS & ANALYSIS English daily: "We in India would be missing the symbolism and significance of Barack Obama taking over as the 44th president of the United States on Tuesday if we were to merely ask what the new president means for India-US relations.... The first black president of the United States is a redemption, even if partial, of the American promise and dream that it is possible for the person of the most ordinary and humble origin to achieve and become the extraordinary.... What is more important is the fact that he brought new ideas and a new vision for the whole of America and in some ways to the world at large.... it is a time of promise and hope for all Americans as they look to Obama to start a new era in American history."

¶12. "WAITING FOR OBAMA," op-ed article by Sumit Ganguly in the January 19 centrist English daily DNA. "Regardless of the other foreign policy choices of the George W Bush administration and their consequences, there is little question that his administration helped to dramatically improve relations with India.... As the Obama administration is poised to enter office, concerns have been expressed both in official and quasi-official circles in India that the bonhomie that had characterized Indo-US relations during the Bush administration will come to a close. There is little reason to assume that US-Indian relations are about to take an adverse turn under the Obama administration. A number of compelling reasons suggest otherwise.... New Delhi should also know that the Indian diaspora in the US has a fundamental interest in ensuring that Indo-US relations remain on an even keel.... Most importantly from India's standpoint, the incoming administration is unlikely to have the same indulgent attitude toward Pakistan.... Instead of uncritically coddling the squalid military establishment and lavishing largesse upon it, the new administration will devote its resources to the social and educational sectors.... There is little reason why these attributes cannot be effectively brought to bear to ensure that Indo-US relations continue to flourish in the era of the Obama administration."

¶13. "MAN OF COLOR," editorial in January 20 centrist THE TELEGRAPH English daily: "As he lifts his hand to take

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oath, Barack Obama will also be forced to think about the immediate legacy he is receiving... People in the U.S., and elsewhere in the world, will expect his powerful rhetoric to be backed by powerful action... There are...areas of domestic policy in which expectations from Mr. Obama are

very high. Many believe that he will reduce healthcare costs and cut taxes. There is also the expectation that State intervention, by way of increased public spending, will become the reigning economic doctrine to resurrect the economy. Mr. Obama...has not expressed himself on these matters... The burden is awesome."

¶14. "REGAINING AMERICA," editorial in January 20 centrist THE STATESMAN English daily: "The facetious say that it has always been the black man's lot to clean up the white man's mess in the USA. The ascendancy...by Mr. Barack Hussein Obama is not, however, one of those things. The mess that his predecessor has left behind may defy a clean-up on many counts and stymie efforts at rectification on others... A refreshing difference may not necessarily be the solution to the mesh of socio-economic problems in a troubled world and an equally suffocating domestic environment caused by...years of inexplicably poor governance in a country that has traditionally provided leadership to the world...."

¶15. "ANY HOPE FROM OBAMA?" editorial in January 20 Guwahati English left-of-center THE SENTINEL: "We must realize that the U.S. Government is a tenacious continuum, with its foreign policy dictated by a brazenly overt hegemonic pursuit... Kashmir still remains the focus of the US foreign policy in South Asia. Mr. Obama, no doubt, will be compelled by various forces to add to the US tendency to broker a solution to the Kashmir 'dispute' so that Pakistan may concentrate on the western front and deliver on its promise to root out the Al-Qaeda-Taliban combine."

¶16. "GOODBYE, AND NONE TOO SOON," editorial in independent English daily THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS (circulation:350,000): "Finally the world can say goodbye to US President George W Bush. He has contributed more than any other political leader in recent history to violence and hatred with his war on terror drawing the world into a battle from which the exit points have still to be defined... Bush leaves office with few supporters. Probably his only main supporter is India, with Manmohan Singh unable to get over his admiration for the U.S. leader to a point where the government has still not established proper links with the new dispensation under President Barack Obama. Bush did manage to get New Delhi to sign the civilian nuclear energy agreement but this has definitely not put India-US relations on a new level, as was promised by both sides. The fact that US has a new President and Lok Sabha elections might throw up a new alternative are factors that can interrupt the relationship for a long while. All said and done the US president who declared not so long ago 'either you are with us, or with them' now finds that the people world over have definitely decided to redefine the 'us' to exclude him."

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¶17. "OBAMA A MYSTERY FOR INDIA," editorial page article by columnist Chandra Bhushan in January 19 centrist NAVBHARAT TIMES Hindi daily: "Since the World War II, the U.S. has an image of being an international bully and a global cop. But today the giant is groveling in the dust - most American financial institutions are down in the dumps, and the U.S. is no more the superpower it used to be. In these circumstances comes Obama to the President's chair. He wants to focus on solving the Kashmir problem so that there is no distraction in the war on terror in Pakistan and Afghanistan. We can expect increased U.S. activism on Kashmir.... Also, Obama could turn out to be the most anti-globalization U.S. President in history. With unemployment wreaking havoc in the U.S., he may be forced to become protectionist and populist. But to remain competitive, American companies will have to find cheaper labor options overseas and hence outsourcing will

be imperative. If the attitude of the Obama Administration becomes insular, then it will have a domino effect in the entire world and may trigger off protectionism. Obama's campaign to save jobs can be a big threat to the world. Thus far, the U.S. administration is a mystery for India - like a closed book."

¶18. "DEEPENING PERIL IN AFGHANISTAN," op-ed article in January 18 right-of-center DAINIK JAGRAN Hindi daily by strategic affairs specialist K. Subrahmanyam: "The key challenge for Barack Obama's foreign policy is not Afghanistan, but Pakistan. Actually, the biggest U.S. concern is jihadis' getting access to Pakistan's nukes... Now the jihadi organizations have become a serious threat to the Pakistan government. The terrorists are able to obstruct U.S. supply to Kabul via Pakistan, but the Pakistan army has a tremendous pressure to act tough against them. If it deceives U.S. like it did in the past, U.S. will halt its aid without which Pakistan will collapse. There was a time when U.S. wasn't afraid of any direct danger to it because of the Pakistan army, but the Americans believe that the Al-Qaida and the Taliban are a direct peril to them and Pakistan despite getting a fat aid has a soft attitude toward them. It is time for Pakistan to decide- if it will support U.S. or the Jihadis?"

¶19. "OBAMA AND TERRORISM," editorial in January 17 nationalist RASHTRIYA SAHARA Hindi daily: "The U.S. president-elect Barack Obama and vice president Joe Biden have indicated their anti-terrorism policy by declaring Al-Qaida and Laden the biggest threat. Obama will have to deal with terrorism, Iraq, Pakistan and Afghanistan on priority basis. Pakistan's border areas are a safe haven for Al-Qaida. Obama promised during his election campaign to destroy Al-Qaida and Taliban by attacking these areas. If he still thinks the same way even after Pakistan visits by U.S. representatives, it can be considered the future Obama Administration's policy. In fact, Biden's saying that Pakistan's situation in Afghanistan is affecting the U.S. success will be a matter of concern for Pakistan. Thus, it can be said that after January 20 the changes Obama will make in the strategy on war

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against terrorism in Afghanistan will include- more aggression, maintain close relations with Pakistan and military offensives in its border areas, weakening of Pakistan factor in Afghanistan etc."

¶20. "WELCOME BARACK," editorial in January 20 left-of-center Marathi daily MAHARASHTRA TIMES. "Time will prove whether the 44th president of the U.S. made any positive difference to the world. But it is certain that no other Head of State, in any part of the globe in recent history, has raised hopes and expectations, as has Barack Obama.... Obama has demonstrated a good pace by choosing the right people for the right slots in the White House. But the real challenge is to put the economy back on track..."

¶21. "A NEW CHAPTER IN AMERICA'S HISTORY BEGINS FROM TODAY," editorial in the January 20 centrist Gujarati daily DIVYA BHASKAR. "Obama's taking over as the 44th President of the United States of America will ring in hope and optimism not only for America but for the global community.... At a time when this man is on the threshold of creating history, we wish him all the best in his efforts." (A similar editorial appeared in the January 19, 2009 multi-edition right-of-center Gujarati daily GUJARAT SAMACHAR).

¶22. "GOODBYE MR. BUSH!" editorial in January 20 left-of-center Marathi daily LOKSATTA. "George W. Bush has been a failure as a president, almost on every front in America - not just in terms of an economic meltdown but also in

the ... social sector.... He will be known as a president of failed missions - disastrous policies that will haunt America for some time."

¶23. "CHALLENGES BEFORE OBAMA," op-ed article by Dr Rashmi Bhure in January 20 centrist Marathi daily SAKAAL.
"Pakistan could also be one of the most serious policy challenges before the new Obama administration.... Instead of co-operation, Pakistan has raised the possibility of a war with India. Now the crux of the matter is that can Obama change Pakistan's stance when he knows that the U.S. needs Pakistan's help in the fight against Taliban terror. Similarly, will the U.S. be able to stop aid to Pakistan when the latter is anyway on the verge of an economic collapse?"

¶24. "HISTORIC CHALLENGE," editorial in the January 20 independent Kolkata Bengali daily, ANANDABAZAR PATRIKA:
"It is not the mere inauguration of an individual... Obama will have the responsibility for building a new multilateral world order appropriate for the post Cold War 21st century. It is his principal duty everywhere including in Iraq, Afghanistan, and in the Middle East... Ideologically, the swearing in of a Black President is an extremely positive thing for countries like India... So...let us hope, Delhi and Washington had been close associates and will continue to remain so."

¶25. "NOT IDEOLOGY, BUT RELYING ON HIS PRAGMATISM," editorial-page article in the January 20 independent

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Kolkata Bengali daily ANANDABAZAR PATRIKA by Assistant Editor Semanti Ghosh: "President Obama, and practically all American Presidents, must realize that there is no use in indulging in child's play. They must sit for a dialogue and that too with the rocket-propelling Hamas. They must understand that there are only two options: either they should move forward and open up avenues for talks...or continue to remain puppets of the Jewish lobby by making innocuous statements... Obama will have to understand from his sense of pragmatism that he will have to campaign within his country even if he wants to advance to solve the Palestinian crisis...."

¶26. "GREEN EMPLOYMENT: OBAMA ADMINISTRATION'S BIG TASK," editorial-page article in January 20 independent Kolkata Bengali daily ANANDABAZAR PATRIKA by columnist Pradip Dutta: "Obama is promising to make investments in the infrastructure sector in order to overcome the economic recession. This investment should be made in such a way that it ensures long-term economic development... Generating 'green employment' will be a big task for the new Obama Administration and for the Congress."

¶27. "JANUARY 20" editorial in January 20 Guwahati Assamese independent ASAMIYA KHABOR: "People are expecting that the U.S. under Obama's leadership will take initiatives to make this world a better place to live by eradicating racism and terrorism ... Obama has already displayed his individuality through the selection of his teammates... The world community is eagerly waiting to see how he rescues his country from the current financial crisis or face other global problems such as Iraq, Afghanistan, nuclear disarmament etc."

¶28. "INDIA'S WEAK DIPLOMACY," editorial page article by editor Sanjay Gupta in January 18 right-of-center DAINIK JAGRAN Hindi daily: "In the beginning the U.S. administration was stern with Pakistan, but later it softened. Both Bush's aides and Obama's went soft. Recently, Hillary Clinton, the future U.S. secretary of state, announced that to strengthen democracy the aid for Pakistan will be trebled. After much huffing and puffing, American diplomats and officials who went to Pakistan in the aftermath of Mumbai, changed their tune once they

reached Islamabad. It remains to be seen what Obama does once he assumes Presidency of the U.S. Those countries who are trying to help resolve the Kashmir problem are unaware that it is the Pakistani-controlled Kashmir that is witnessing so much misery. India has failed to effectively project this."

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